



# Senator **Brad Benson**

6th Legislative District

## 2006 Session Newsletter

Winter 2006

### Please keep in touch:

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1-800-562-6000

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[http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/  
SRC/Senators/Benson.htm](http://www1.leg.wa.gov/Senate/SRC/Senators/Benson.htm)

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope you all had a merry Christmas and a happy and safe New Year's Day. My wife Jill and I spent the holidays in Spokane with our children, Ashley, Patrick, Graham and Hannah, and our grandson, Dane.

The 2006 Washington State Legislature has now begun, and although it's only a 60 day session this year, I am confident that we will get a lot accomplished. I am looking forward to reaching across the aisle to find common ground on some of the important issues that we are facing.

Since I am now the lead Republican on the Senate Transportation Committee, it is my responsibility to make sure the Department of Transportation lives up to its promises and completes projects on-time and on-budget. I will be working with other committee members to make sure our state's transportation system, from freight rail to roads, is serving people on both sides of Washington in a way that keeps them and our goods moving throughout the state.

I also appreciate you taking the time to fill out and return the questionnaire I sent in my last newsletter. Many of you sent in your responses telling me what issues are important to you this session. I've included some of the results inside this newsletter, so be sure to check it out.

As always, I am honored to be able to serve you in the Washington State Senate, and please feel free to contact me any time with questions, concerns or comments. My office phone number is 360-786-7610, or you can use the legislative hotline toll-free at 1-800-562-6000. You can also e-mail me at Benson.Brad@leg.wa.gov. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brad Benson".

**Brad Benson**

State Senator, 6th District



## Passing “Jessica’s Law Plus”

As state legislators, it is our responsibility to ensure that every child in Washington is protected from violent sex offenders. That means passing tough laws and putting severe punishments in place.

The tragic kidnapping of 8-year-old Shasta Groene, and the murder of her brother, 9-year-old Dylan Groene in Idaho last May, was allegedly perpetrated by Joseph Duncan, who was out on bail for child molestation charges at the time and had a history of sex offenses. These kinds of horrible incidents make it clear that tougher laws are needed to deal with these offenders.

According to the survey results that were mailed back to my office, public safety and law enforcement is one of your most important issues, and many of you want tougher sex offender laws.

Right now, something called the Special Sex Offender Sentencing Alternative (SSOSA) allows some sex offenders to serve only six months in jail after being convicted of raping a child in their own family. This session, I plan on supporting legislation aimed at



doing away with SSOSA's get-out-of-jail-free approach to sex offenders, and increasing the penalty for sex offenders who victimize young children to a mandatory sentence of 25-years to life in prison, plus lifetime electronic monitoring.

## Increasing Access to Health Care

Another important issue you responded to is health care. Many of you want to see better access to health care. Fast-rising health care costs are a growing burden not only for individuals, families and employers, but also for state government. These costs are consuming more of our available state revenue and putting greater pressure on state operating budgets.

In 2003, Congress authorized Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) as part of the Medicare Modernization Act. HSAs are tax-free accounts that can be set up by individuals or employers. They are personal accounts owned by individuals, even when employers establish and contribute to them. These accounts are

coupled with catastrophic health care insurance policies, some of which cover preventative care. Deductibles can be paid from the HSA and any remaining money at the end of a year can be rolled over to the next year.

The idea behind HSAs is to reduce reliance on “first dollar coverage,” in which health care consumers aren't seeing the whole picture or the total cost of health care. HSAs are con-

sumer-driven, creating an incentive for people to weigh their personal needs when making health care decisions.

HSAs help cut costs for employers and employees alike. Making HSAs an option for public employees will provide state employees with an important health care option (already available to federal and private sector employees) and take some pressure off the state budget.



## Legislature Makes Law, Not Supreme Court

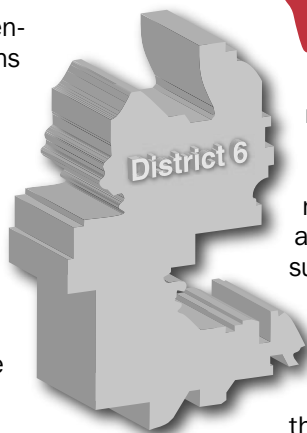
A few cases have come before Washington State's Supreme Court in which the court has essentially made legislation. Separation of powers requires a court to resist the temptation to rewrite unambiguous state laws to suit its notions of public policy and to recognize that the drafting of laws is a legislative rather than judicial function.

The State Supreme Court is soon expected to rule on Washington's Defense of Marriage Act, a bipartisan-passed law that defines marriage as a legal union between a man and a woman. I feel strongly that the Supreme Court should rule only on the constitutionality of the law, and not the intent. Should the high court find the law unconstitutional, I would expect them to send the issue back to the lawmakers for clarification rather than declaring something to be legal that is clearly against the will of the legislature and the people.

Although Eastern Washington voters opposed the most recent transportation taxes, the statewide initiative to repeal the taxes failed.

I'm disappointed that Spokane receives only a fraction of our tax dollars back from the state, but I am now committed to ensuring the Department of Transportation delivers on its promise to complete projects on-time and on-budget. The public expects accountability.

It's important to identify affordable solutions to our transportation needs and get projects completed. Taxpayers want legislators to make sure we're not flushing money down the drain. We need to avoid projects similar to the Alaskan Way Viaduct, which began as a



repair project and ballooned into a \$4 billion tunnel. Even the Seattle voters, who largely supported the new taxes, voted last year to end an expensive monorail project and supported performance audits of state agencies.

We can get more done for our tax dollar. Washington currently spends more than the national average to build a mile of road. Constructing projects at even an average cost makes money available for other projects without raising taxes. The legisla-

ture created a State Transportation Permit Efficiency and Accountability Committee to find ways to reduce time delays and project costs.

I intend to focus on what we accomplish with our tax dollars and that's exactly what I intend to do with each transportation project.

We have been promised an improved transportation system in Washington. As the lead Republican on the Senate Transportation Committee, I intend to hold DOT accountable to keep that promise.



## This Land Is Our Land

Many of you have expressed your dissatisfaction with the State of Washington for owning too much property and not being able to pay for it. I have watched the State Parks department repeatedly request money to manage property it already owns, only to see them acquire still more land. We're left with an even larger parcel of mismanaged state-owned land, which inevitably falls victim to pest infestation, overgrowth and wildfires.

We currently have a \$40 million backlog of major maintenance needed in Washington State Parks. Capital facilities needs are estimated at \$300 million over the next 10 years.

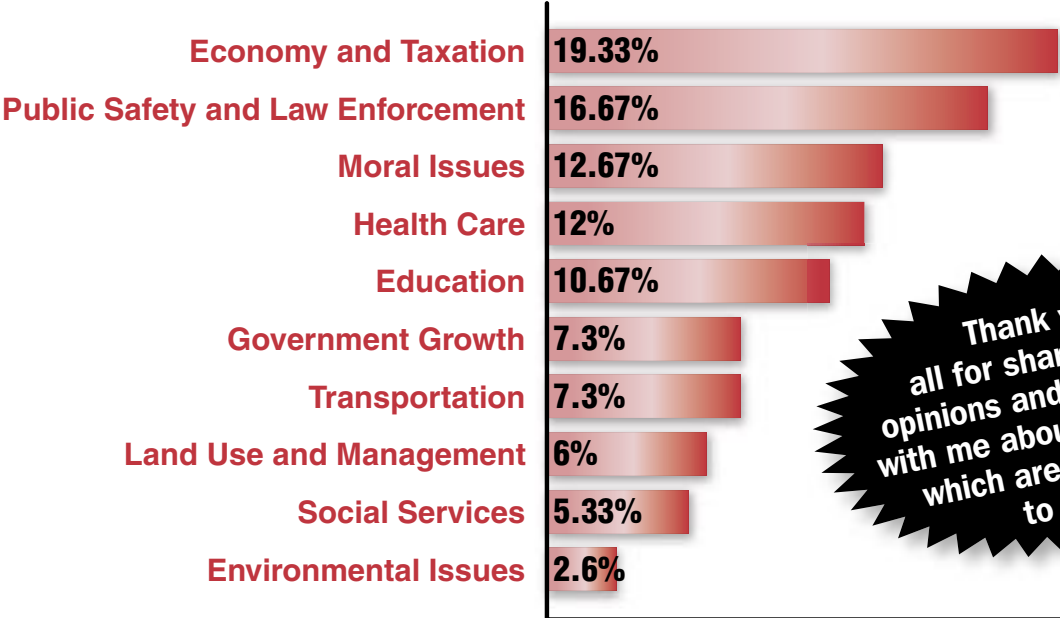
In 2003, Washington State Parks came to the state legislature with a day use fee proposal. We were told the only way to keep the parks open was with the fee.

The 2005-07 state operating budget transferred the fees from the parks to the General Fund. This example is repeated far too often in Olympia. Use fees intended to offset the costs of popular programs and services are then diverted to less popular General Fund spending.

I am committed to restoring trust in government, and we should start by doing the things we say we're going to do and keeping our promises.

# 6th District Top Issues

Many of you responded to the survey I sent out in my last newsletter, and I've included those results below.



Thank you  
all for sharing your  
opinions and comments  
with me about the issues  
which are important  
to you.

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